

## The Many Faces of the Harbormaster's Office

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

Each morning at 7am the Harbormaster's office on Mattakeesett Court comes to life.

Endangered Species officer Corey Wisneski heads to the beach to monitor the population of piping plovers.

Piping plovers became an endangered species during the 1940s and 1950s when building houses near the beach became popular. The plovers build their homes on the beach and with increased construction, their habitat was being destroyed.

"The plovers build their nests and lay their eggs in the sand," said Wisneski. "Their nests are not really that protected and animals can get to their eggs and people can accidentally step on them."

To help prevent the eggs from being crushed, Wisneski built metal fence enclosures around the four nests on the beach. The mesh has spaces wide enough to let the parent plovers in, but small enough to keep people and predators out. A vile with coyote urine is attached to each side of the fence to keep foxes away.

"Last summer, we had a huge problem with the foxes that live on the beach eating the

plover eggs and chicks," said Wisneski.

Unfortunately, Mother Nature plays a role in the fate of the plovers as well. The storm on June 6 destroyed four of the ten plover nests. Luckily, it was early enough in the season for the birds to renest.

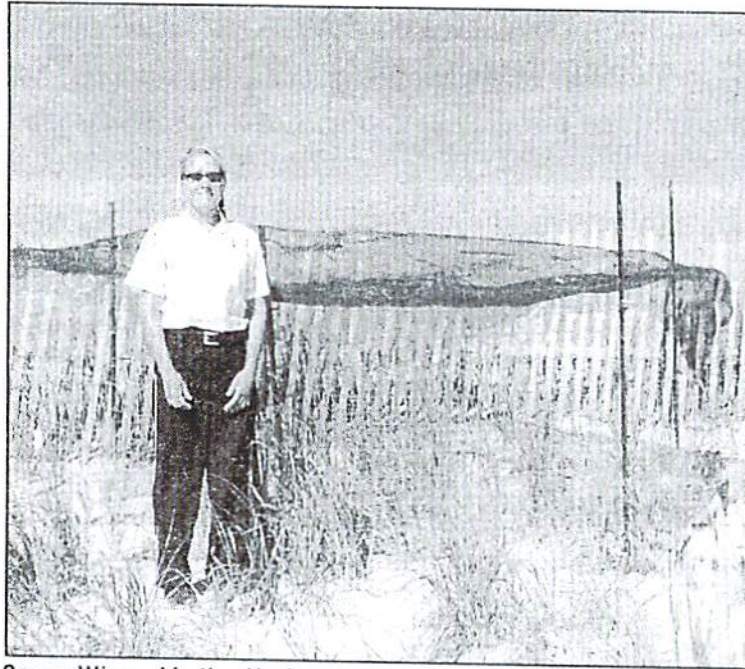
The piping plovers are gray and white colored birds that are only about five inches tall and six or seven inches in length. Baby plovers look like little cotton balls. The babies can walk a few hours after hatching and eat on their own from the start. They usually are able to fly about 30 days after hatching.

Decades later, the Atlantic population is doing well. There are two nests with chicks flying and four nests with eggs on Duxbury beach.

Monitors are employed to keep people away from the nests and to monitor the progress of the chicks after they hatch.

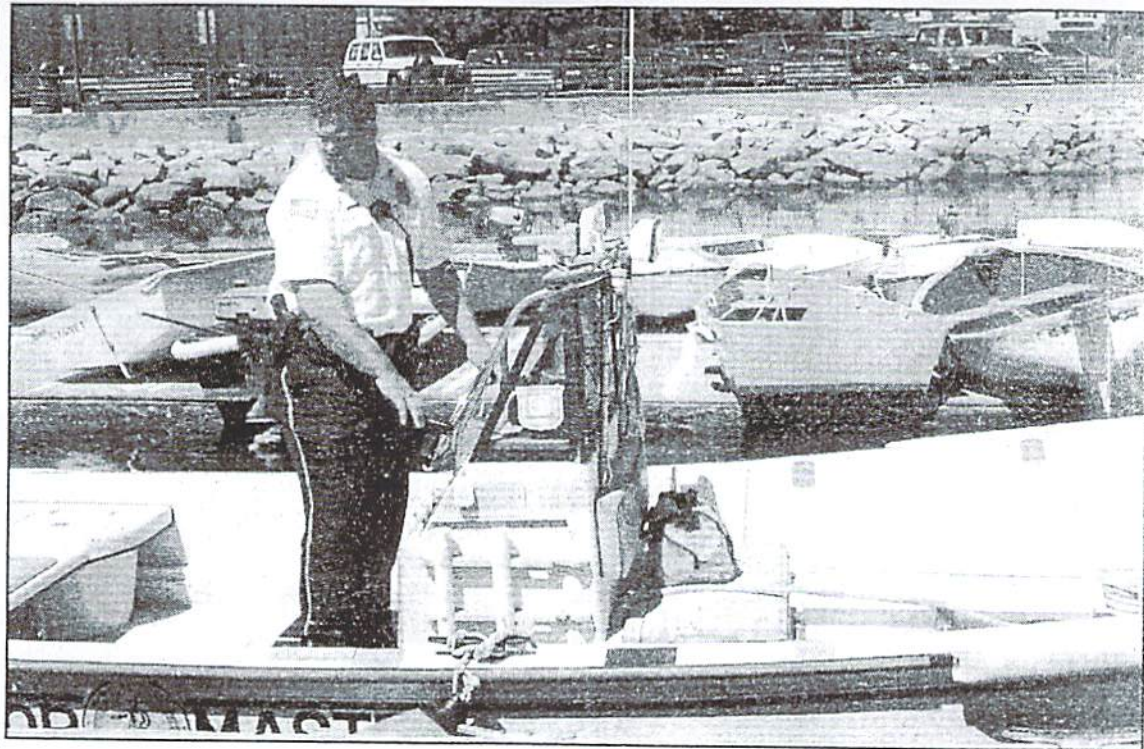
The birds eat flies, fleas, and crustaceans found on the mudflats. Sometimes the birds will cross the four-wheel drive road to the other side of the beach to get food. Monitors stop the traffic to allow the birds to cross safely.

Once the birds hatch, beach



Corey Wisneski, the Harbormaster's endangered species officer, spends many of her mornings monitoring the piping plovers.





Executive officer Dennis Pearse patrols the 37 miles of Duxbury's shoreline.

traffic is slowed and the area on the beach where the nests are is closed for 100 yards around each nest with babies. Monitors prevent people from parking in these areas.

As well as monitoring the plovers each day, Wisneski opens the beach in the mornings and patrols the area for problems.

While, Wisneski patrols the beach and takes care of the wildlife, harbormaster assistants are busy in other areas of town.

Harbormaster assistants check for beach stickers and for proper permits in shellfish beds.

A typical day for executive officer Dennis Pearse involves patrolling the 37 miles of Duxbury shoreline, as well as office work.

When out on the boat, Pearse checks the anchorage for mooring rafts, assists people with pump out services to pump heads on their boats, patrols for the proper number of life jackets on a boat, and assists in search and rescue operations.

"Basically we make sure that everyone is playing by the rules," said Pearse.

The Duxbury Harbormaster

must listen to calls that come across the radio in the office because not only do they assist Duxbury residents, but also they aid the towns of Plymouth and Kingston in search and rescue missions.

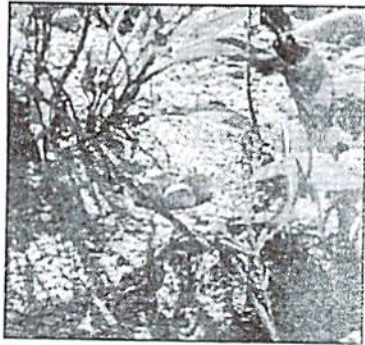
The harbormaster assistants patrol the waters from 7 each morning to 2am. There are three to four guys patrolling the beach on the weekdays and two guys patrolling the waters and monitoring the office calls. Staff is increased on the weekends with five to seven men on the beach and three to four men on the water or in the office. The night shifts have two men on the beach and one in the office.

"Each night, one of the men patrolling the beach will have boat experience in case the guy in the office needs help," said Pearse.

Another important task for harbormaster assistants is listening to and posting the weather conditions on the dock. The yacht club and Maritime School pay close attention to the weather advisories during the summer months when they run their different aquatics programs. During a small craft advisory, the harbormaster's of-

fice advises boats on the safety conditions and will tell canoes and other small boats to get out of the water. During gale winds, the office has the right to terminate water use.

"We especially watch kayaks and board sailors during



Plover eggs can be difficult to detect on the beach.

windy weather," said Pearse.

The office has helped in several search and rescue operations in Duxbury waters. In mid June, the harbormaster's office helped rescue three people from their boat that sank off of King Caesar.

Last Sunday, the office helped in a search and rescue with the coast guard and Plymouth Harbormaster using boats and helicopters after a sailboat with its sails up was





The Piping Plovers population has rebounded after becoming an endangered species 50 years ago.

## **Faces of the Harbormaster's Office**

continued from page one

found capsized. The occupants of the boat were no where to be found. It turned out that the occupants were on shore and they boat had capsized while they were away.

"Some people think that we act too prematurely," said Pearse. "But it is better to be safe than sorry."

Harbormaster Don Beers and executive officer Dennis Pearse are the only two allowed to carry a gun. They are trained by the police and must retrain

each year. They have to follow the general guidelines for carrying and operating a firearm.

"We need to carry a gun because when you are on the water, you are separated from the rest of the world," said Don Beers. "If there is ever an incident out on the bay, it could take an hour for back up to arrive and you need to have some sort of protection."

Whether protecting the plovers or residents on the water or at the beach, the harbormaster's office is definitely a busy place each sum-

mer day.

"My job is unique because I get to spend the day on the water or at the beach," said Pearse. "But it is a lot of fun because I love helping people."

Beers has been harbormaster for 23 years and enjoys his job because he enjoys the residents of Duxbury.

"The people in this town are great," said Beers. "It was a fluke that I ended up working in this town, but I have stayed because I really enjoy teaching people the correct way to operate on the water."